

# The Complaints Process

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## Introduction

**The College of Veterinarians of Ontario regulates the delivery of veterinary medicine in Ontario. All veterinarians who practise in Ontario must be licensed by the College.**

**In serving the public interest, the College seeks to understand the risks involved in the practice of veterinary medicine and collaborates with partners to develop solutions which reduce the potential for harm to animals and people.**

**The College sets standards of practice and expects veterinarians to meet them. One of the College's responsibilities, as set out in the Veterinarians Act, is to investigate and resolve concerns about a veterinarian and that veterinarian's practice.**

## How does the complaints process start?

In order for the College to review and investigate complaints from the public, a complaint must be received from a complainant by the College in writing. The letter of complaint may be submitted by mail, fax or email and should clearly and precisely set out the following information:

- the name(s) of the veterinarian(s) being complained about (a complaint cannot be about a veterinary facility)
- the name of the veterinary facility
- a description of the problem
- an outline of the concerns or issues for the Committee to consider



- the dates on which the events occurred
- the name and contact information of anyone else who may be able to provide further information
- copies of invoices or other documentation that may aid the Committee in its review of the issues
- the name of the animal(s), if applicable
- the complainant's full name and mailing address

## **Are all letters of complaint forwarded to the Complaints Committee?**

Letters of complaint are reviewed by the staff of the College. If appropriate, a staff member will suggest that the concern be resolved through the College's Mediated Resolutions Program (MRP). If the MRP is not desired by either party, or unsuccessful, then the matter is directed to the Complaints Committee.

For example, minor standards issues and/or miscommunication. Once the MRP is complete, it must go to the Committee for approval. All complaints must go before the Committee.

## **How is the complaint processed?**

If not suitable for MRP, the matter is directed to the Complaints Committee. Staff begin to process the complaint by gathering information for the Complaints Committee investigation. The timeline for the completion of the complaints process from start to finish includes administrative processing, the investigation, meeting of the Committee and decision writing.

## **What does the investigation involve?**

An investigation generally involves the following steps:

1. Each veterinarian named in the complaint is individually notified and provided a copy of the letter of complaint. At this time, the veterinarian is asked to forward a copy of the pertinent medical records, and provide the College with the names of staff members (auxiliary or professional) that may be able to provide further information.
2. The issues or concerns arising from the letter of complaint are summarized and forwarded to the complainant for confirmation.
3. When confirmed, the list of issues is forwarded to the veterinarian responding to the complaint. The veterinarian is asked to submit a written response.
4. Witnesses identified by the complainant or the veterinarian(s) named in the complaint are contacted, and written or recorded statements are gathered.



5. A copy of the Record of Investigation (i.e. copies of all materials to be presented to the Complaints Committee for an investigation) is sent to both parties, once all information pertaining to the file is collected.

### **Third-party complaints**

Due to privacy concerns, the College requires written authorization from the owner or person whose name is on the medical records, to allow the third-party complainant to be privy to the information gathered by the College.

### **What happens if other veterinarians are involved?**

Other veterinarians involved in the treatment of the patient may be asked for their comments and copies of their records for the Committee to review.

### **What is the next step?**

The entire investigative file is forwarded to the members of a panel of the Complaints Committee.

### **Who are the members of the Complaints Committee?**

The Committee consists of up to ten members, nine of whom are practicing veterinarians. The other individual is a public member appointed by the provincial government. The Committee meets in panels consisting of five or six members, which always include the public member.

### **How does the Complaints Committee function?**

The Committee reviews between twelve and fifteen new cases at each panel meeting. Fourteen to sixteen panel meetings are held each year. Most cases are considered in a single meeting, but some are deferred in order to request further information, including expert advice in some cases.

### **What decisions can the Committee make?**

Possible decisions include:

- The Committee has no concerns with the veterinarian's actions or conduct and will take no further action.
- The Committee has some concerns with the veterinarian's actions or conduct which it feels can be addressed through education or advice.



- The Committee has very serious concerns and has referred the case for a hearing of the Discipline Committee.
- The complaint was frivolous, vexatious made in bad faith or for an improper purpose and is otherwise an abuse of process.

The decision and reasons of the Committee is prepared in writing and sent to the complainant(s) and the responding veterinarian(s) following the decision. Decisions are not provided over the telephone by College staff.

### **Can the Complaints Committee award money or damages?**

No, only the courts can do this.

### **What recourse is there if the complainant or the veterinarian is dissatisfied with the decision of the Committee?**

There is an appeal mechanism available to either party through the Health Professions Appeal and Review Board. This Board, established by the provincial government and arms length from the College, reviews decisions of the Committee, when requested.

The Board determines whether the Complaints Committee's decision was reasonable and whether the investigation was adequate.

### **For more information about the Complaints process, please visit our website at: [www.cvo.org](http://www.cvo.org)**

If you have any questions about the complaints process, please reach out to our Investigations and Hearings team at [complaints@cvo.org](mailto:complaints@cvo.org) or call (519) 824-5600/1-800-424-2856 x 2403

A written statement of complaint may be submitted to:

College of Veterinarians of Ontario  
2-71 Hanlon Creek Blvd.,  
Guelph, ON N1C 0B1  
[complaints@cvo.org](mailto:complaints@cvo.org)

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained. The College encourages you to refer to the website ([www.cvo.org](http://www.cvo.org)) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.

# COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The vast majority of veterinarians in Ontario deliver high quality veterinary care. Only a small number of veterinarians end up with a complaint and possibly discipline action.

In governing the practice of veterinary medicine, the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) is dedicated to protecting the public interest. In fulfilling this mandate, the College is responsible for overseeing the professional conduct of licensed veterinarians practising in Ontario. The College receives, investigates, and acts upon all complaints made against its licensed members.



## Participants:

- Client/Complainant
- Veterinarian
- College of Veterinarians of Ontario
- Committee of the CVO

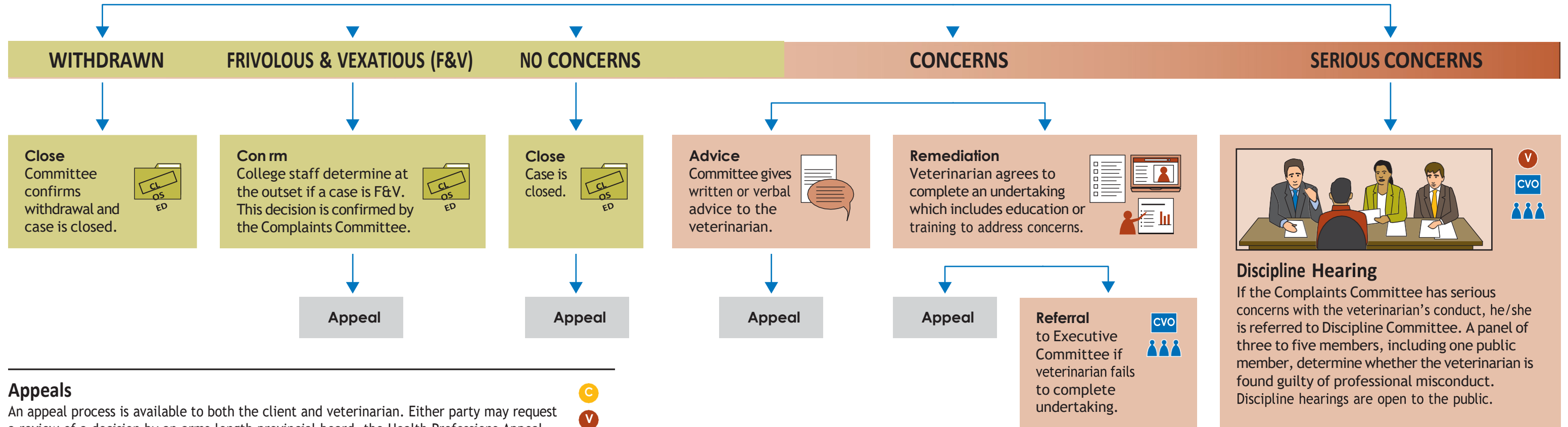
**Complaint**  
If a client has a concern about a veterinarian, he/she may choose to file a complaint with the College.

**Investigation**  
During the investigation, both the client and veterinarian are asked by College staff to provide information concerning the case.

**Complaints Committee**  
A panel of licensed veterinarians and a representative of the public, reviews and examines each case.

**Mediated Resolutions Program (MRP)**  
With minor standards issues and/or miscommunication, the veterinarian and client are invited to participate in the MRP, a voluntary resolutions process that focuses on quality improvement and education. The result of the MRP is reviewed by the Complaints Committee.

## Possible Outcomes



**Appeals**  
An appeal process is available to both the client and veterinarian. Either party may request a review of a decision by an arms-length provincial board, the Health Professions Appeal and Review Board. The College provides the Committee's record of the investigation, which includes all the materials used to make the decision, to the Appeal Board.